Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

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CHAPTER X

John Campbell

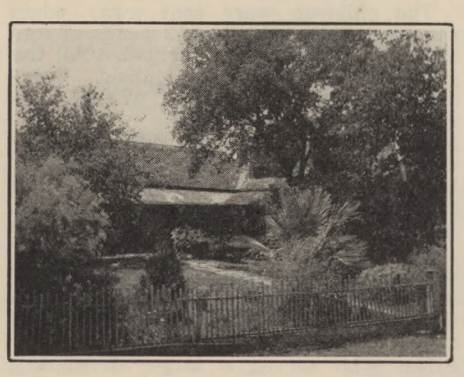
Atascosa County

THE John Campbell home, still standing a short distance from the new San Antonio-Corpus Christi highway, was among the first homes in Atascosa county. It was here the old stage coach made the only stop between San Antonio and Oakville. The John Campbells were noted for their hospitality. The *drummers* and other salesmen looked forward to spending the night there, not only as a place of lodging but for a taste of home life during their several weeks or months away from their own families. They always received a hearty welcome from every member of the family. Although they made the Campbell home their headquarters while in that section of the State they were never allowed to pay for either meals or lodging. Their appreciation was shown in gifts to the children.

John Campbell was born in Ireland in 1834 and came to Guadalupe county in 1851 with an uncle, also named John Campbell, who had previously settled on the Cibolo near Seguin. Six years later he and his brother, Edward, moved to Atascosa county to go into the ranching business.

Mr. Campbell married Mary Irvin on February 18, 1867. They moved immediately to their new home on the ranch located on the present site of Campbellton, which at that time was an open prairie with beautiful lakes fed by springs. It was a two-room log cabin meagerly furnished, but containing a handmade walnut bedstead still being used in the Campbell home. Cook stoves were luxuries that came later. Mr. Campbell was away most of the day time and frequently late at night. Mrs. Campbell was lonely and the coyotes howled and the Mexican lions roared. So she persuaded her sister to spend much of the time with her. They would sit on the doorstep in the darkness, listening to sounds of the night, always on the alert to distinguish an unfamiliar noise, or the welcome rattle of her husband's wagon, or the hoof-beat of his horse that would announce that he was coming home.

MRS. JOHN CAMPBELL



The John Campbell home at Campellton as it is today.

Mrs. Campbell did the cooking with the meager equipment afforded in those days. The family washing was done in the San Antonio River nearby during the first few years. Later a wash house and a smokehouse were built in the yard.

John Campbell and his brother, Edward, were busy with their steadily increasing herds of cattle, sheep, and goats. Oakville, the nearest town, was 28 miles away and the roads over which one had to travel were rough and frequently muddy. Supplies were brought from Indianola in ox wagons; later by mule teams. In order to supply his needs and those of the nearby ranchmen, Mr. Campbell established a store in 1867, built of rock, conveniently near the house. The major portion of his merchandise consisted of fine saddles, men's hats, boots, gloves, and clothing. This represented a big investment for that day and time.

The Campbell family was not bothered with the Indians, but they had to watch out for low class Mexicans and renegade Americans. One night the dogs barked continuously. Early the next morning when the Mexican helper returned from the pasture with the horses he reported to Mr. Campbell that the store door was open and that the store had been robbed. Mr. Campbell could hardly believe it. Upon investigation they found that several men evidently had stood guard behind the smokehouse while the other robbers had stripped the store of a fresh supply of good merchandise and made their escape. There had been an attempt to burglarize the store once before.

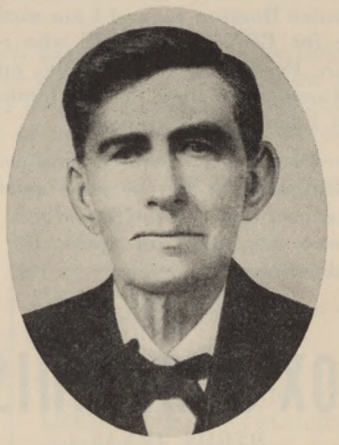
Two years later the last attempt to rob the store was made. Again a fresh supply of merchandise had just been placed on the shelves. But one of the robbers got "cold feet" and gave the plans to a Texas ranger. The ranger told Mr. Campbell and a warm welcome was prepared.

Mr. Campbell sent his wife and children to the home of his sister, six miles away, although she pleaded with him to let her stay in the smoke house in order to be near him. He refused to let her stay and endanger herself and the children. The children thought they were going on a pleasure trip to visit "Auntie." Mrs. Campbell was a true pioneer wife and mother, fearless and unafraid, and usually did not burden anyone with her troubles and she did not falter then. But she could not sleep. About midnight she told her sister-in-law what was happening and together they waited grimly for morning to come.

Early the next morning Mr. Campbell sent one of his men to bring the family home. It was a happy home coming for the husband and father was safe.

But there had been a big fight. Mr. Campbell and the rangers hid in the small room in the back of the store. John Kemper, the only man alive who participated in the fight, lives at Pearsall. He was working on his books after supper when the robber (who had notified the ranger of the proposed plan to rob the store) came in and covered him with a gun and marched him away from the store. The other robbers had brought empty wagons and good teams expecting to make a full haul. As the robbers began pulling goods off the shelves, the hidden men appeared and opened fire. The robbers answered with their guns. During the fight two men were killed and three wounded. Mr. and Mrs. Campbell kept one of the robbers in their home and nursed him until his mother came after him. They called a doctor and cared for him more tenderly than did his mother after her arrival. That was the last attempt to rob the store. It was the only store between Pleasanton and Oakville. The old stage hack, running from San Antonio to Oakville, stopped there and changed horses.

As the size of the family grew, a larger house was built on the same site and it is still standing. As his business expanded, Mr. Campbell provided all the conveniences and help available for the comfort and pleasure of his family. A Mexican, Pasqual Garcia, cooked for Mrs. Campbell for 35 years during the time she was rearing the children. His daughter is still in the employ of the Campbell children living in the old



JOHN CAMPBELL

home. Mr. Campbell had kept the books for the store and the ranch activities at night in the early days before their business justified the keeping of a bookkeeper. The children still have bills of lading tied neatly with ribbon that were received during that time. But as the business grew, and adequate help was secured for taking care of the home, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell often rode together. The ranch activities were directed through an overseer. Mr. Campbell bought and raised horses and sold many of them on the market in New Orleans. He sold many of his cattle on the northern markets but he remained at home to direct the activities there. In addition to the herds of sheep, goats and cattle he raised cotton, corn, and feed. Later he established a cotton gin.

While the Campbells lived modestly in the early days while they were getting a start, he later had sufficient means and was eager to spend it on his family. In order that his children might have schooling until they were old enough to be sent away to school, Mr. Campbell built the first school house in the community on his land and paid the school teacher and boarded him free. However, he insisted on all of the children in the community attending this school. The first school teacher was a very brilliant man who wanted to get away from the city.

The children were sent away when they were about 10 and 12 years of age to attend a preparatory school. All the girls received training in music. Jourdan, the oldest child, and Willie were graduated from St. Mary's in San Antonio. Ed Campbell attended St. Edwards in Austin. Ross graduated at St. Mary's in Austin, and Annie and Sallie graduated at Ursiline Academy in San Antonio.

Mr. and Mrs. Campbell were interested in their children and the children of the community receiving religious training. They were member of the Catholic church. In the early days the Priest who served a large Missionary district, came about every two months in order that everyone in the community might have an opportunity to attend mass. Mrs. Campbell would erect an altar in the home for him; later a church was built.

Tributes on Mother's Day

While the Campbells were public spirited and were ever on the alert to do all they could for the welfare of the community, Mrs. Campbell was also both nurse and doctor for many of her neighbors. The nearest doctor lived at Oakville. So people came to her for advice and for medicine when their loved ones were ill. Her first two children were born in Seguin in order that she might be near a doctor. She nursed the Mexicans and negroes as well as the whites, and many of them looked upon her as a mother, and remembered her on Mother's Day as long as she lived.

One of the pleasures the children remember was visiting the nearby relatives. There were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Tom and Mr. and Mrs. Simp Tom. Later Mr. and Mrs. James Kerr came from Ireland and lived several months in the Campbell home until they could get located. Although the sisters-in-law had not met until then they were very companionable. Later when four of the Campbell children had measles Mrs. Kerr left her own family and came to the aid of her brother's family and remained with them until Mrs. Campbell could care for them.

The Campbell home was a happy one according to the children. Mr. Campbell had so much business to see after he probably did not play with them as much as Mrs. Campbell. "He was strict, but Mother always protected us," recalls Sallie, now Mrs. Eidson. But when she did punish them she usually waited until they were in bed at night. Two of the girls and two negro children ran away one time and went swimming in the San Antonio River. The older sister, Annie, told on them because they were too near the road. They knew they had disobeyed orders. So when they came in that night they did not want any supper. Mrs. Campbell did not say anything. But, later when punishment had been administered they all felt better.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Campbell were great readers. The entire family spent many pleasant evenings reading around the fireside, and playing "Five Hundred" and "Seven Up."

As the children grew older the home became more and more a social center. They would sometimes have as many as thirty guests in the house. Nearly always there were several week-end guests. Mr. Campbell preferred that they entertain at home instead of visiting so much and he provided everything possible for their pleasure. He had plenty of horses that ranked among the best in the country. Horseback riding naturally was one of the favorite pastimes for the Campbell children and their guests. He also had good hunting dogs. Hunting quail in the daytime and coon hunting at night were among the sports they enjoyed. The children had been trained in dancing. An invitation to attend a dance at the Campbell home was welcomed far and near. They danced the old square dances, schottishes and waltzes, popular at that time.

Both Mrs. Campbell and her eldest daughter, Annie, were excellent cooks. As Mrs. Campbell began riding with Mr. Campbell to look after his business, Annie gradually assumed most of the responsibilities of directing the housekeeping. This was not a burden to her for she loved it. Then, too, they had excellent servants. It was not unusual to have six and eight unexpected guests for dinner or supper, but Pasqual Garcia was equal to it.

"My! Lordy" What'll I fix," he would ask with a smile. But he always prepared a good meal.

And there was always a supply of good food in the Campbell home. They raised a garden if anyone in the country did. There were turkeys, chickens, eggs, milk and butter, butchered hogs, home-made lard and home cured ham. Mrs. Campbell was noted for her excellent sausage which was made by mixing ground pork, chili pepper, big Mexican peppers ground together in an old fashioned sausage mill and mixed with sage, allspice, cloves and a little vinegar.

Mrs. Campbell and Annie were wonderful seamstresses and supervised the

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sewing for the entire family and for the Mexican and negro help. Mexican women did most of the actual work under their instructions.

Mr. and Mrs. Campbell were such congenial companions and worked so closely together that when he died on April 8, 1911, a woman of less courage and strength of character would simply have marked time until her call came. But she had lived so richly within herself that she had plenty of sustaining grace. She knew his business so well that she could and did take charge of the farm and ranch activities. She lived about 25 years after his death. She continued to take an interest in the affairs of the community and always read the daily papers. She loved young people and preferred their society to those nearer her age. Their modern ways did not shock her. She and her granddaughter, Mary Jane Burke, were real pals.

She lived to see the old rock store torn down to make way for the new airport. She saw many methods of transportation come to the little town of Campbellton, named for her husband, the ox-wagon, the horse and carriage, the automobile, the train and the airplane. She saw the building of Jourdanton, a town named for her eldest son-Jourdan. He and Colonel Zandleson are said to have laid out the towns of Jourdanton and Charlotte, and perhaps had more to do with establishing them than anyone else. The first postoffice was established near the present site of Campbellton in 1874, and was called Bell Branch, probably named for a nearby creek. In 1879, it was changed to Campbellton. John Campbell was the first postmaster and a member of the Campbell family has been postmaster or postmistress ever since. They succeeded each other as follows: Jourdan Campbell succeeded his father and was followed by his brothers, Willie Campbell and Edward Campbell; Louise Campbell, Jourdan Campbell's eldest daughter, Clyce, third daughter of Jourdan Campbell, and then Sallie Campbell Eidson, a daughter of John Campbell. She is serving as postmistress now.

In 1932 the Atascosa County Federation of Women's Clubs held a special meeting, honoring pioneer women. They especially honored Mrs. Campbell by presenting her with a gift of an Italian cypress, and by planting it in her yard. Her daughter, Mrs. Ross Burke, gave a short Campbell biography while women from all over the county expressed appreciation for what she meant to them. She received huge bouquets that day—flowers that brightened her days for the remainder of her life. She died in 1936.

The children born to Mr. and Mrs. John Campbell were Jourdan Campbell, dead, married Alice Marr of Pleasanton. Annie Campbell, dead, unmarried. Sallie Campbell, the present postmistress, is the widow of Guy Eidson. Ross Campbell, married E. L. Burke, Beeville, is a widow. W. I. Campbell, unmarried, lives in Campbellton.

Mrs. Burke, Mrs. Eidson and W. I. Campbell are still living in the old Campbell home. They with the Ed Campbells are substantial citizens in the town named for their father.

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